WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   In a system for implementing a program having
participants, said program permitting the participants to
obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants who
are part of the program and who are part of a credit/debit

5   card network, which credit/debit card network also includes
unauthorized merchants who are not part of the program and
who are part of the credit/debit card network, each merchant
having access via an input/output (I/O) port to a
credit/debit card network, said system including a plurality

10   of debit and/or credit cards, each having a unique account
number corresponding to an account of the participant; the
improvement comprising:

       a.   a filter interfacing with the credit/debit card
network and accessing the following program data:

15   1.   data identifying the authorized unique account
               numbers of the participants, and

               2.   data identifying the authorized merchants;

       b.   said filter including means, responsive to an
initiating transaction based on an initiating account number,

20   for transmitting from the credit/debit card network to the
filter the following transaction data:

               1.   the account number of the card initiating the
               transaction,

               2.   merchant identification data of the merchant

25   involved in the initiating transaction, and

               3.   data regarding the amount of the initiated
               transaction;

       c.   said filter including means for evaluating the
transaction data transmitted to the filter by the

30 credit/debit card network by comparing the transaction data
to the program data;

     d.   said filter including means for generating
validating data for the transaction when the evaluated
transaction data indicates that the transaction involves an
35 authorized merchant using the unique account number of one of
the participants;

     e.   said filter evaluating means including means for
generating invalidating data for the transaction when the
evaluated transaction data indicates that the initiating
40 account number is not one of the authorized account numbers;

     f.   said filter evaluating means including means for
generating invalidating data for the transaction when the
evaluated transaction data indicates that the merchant
involved in the transaction is not one of the authorized
45 merchants; and

     g.   said filter including means for transmitting the
validating or invalidating data to the credit/debit card
network so that the credit/debit card network provides the
validating or invalidating data for the evaluated transaction
to the merchant involved in the transaction.

     2.   The filter of claim 1 wherein the amount of the
initiated transaction is in a currency denomination such as
dollars, wherein each account has a point value, wherein the
evaluating means converts the point value of the account
5 corresponding to the initiating account number into the
currency denomination of the amount of the initiating
transaction, and wherein the evaluating means generates the
validating data if the converted point value equals or
exceeds the amount of the initiating transaction.

3. The filter of claim 2 wherein said filter processor evaluating means comprises a banking processor.

4. The filter of claim 1 wherein the filter processor is maintained by a program administrator having a commission account and wherein the program administrator via an automated clearing house credits or deposits a transaction commission amount for each validated transaction to the commission account of the program administrator and debits or removes the transaction commission amount to an account of the merchant involved in the transaction.

5. The filter of claim 4 wherein the credit/debit card network processor deducts the commission amount credited to the merchant involved in the transaction from the merchant's proceeds from the validated transaction.

6. The filter of claim 1 wherein the cards include embossing relating to the program.

7. The filter of claim 1 wherein the cards are debit cards having a magnetic strip encoded with a number corresponding to the unique account number of the participant whereby the transaction is transparent to the merchants involved in the transactions such that the involved merchant cannot distinguish between transactions using debit cards and transactions using credit cards.

8. The filter of claim 7 wherein at least some merchants have a card reader adapted to be connected to the I/O port and wherein the initiating transaction is initiated by reading the magnetic strip of the card.

9. The filter of claim 1 wherein the filter processor generates redemption reports for each merchant indicating card transactions by participants and wherein the filter processor generates account reports for each participant in the program indicating transactions by such participant and indicating the amount of points in such participant's account.

10. The filter of claim 1 wherein the filter processor deletes from the program data authorized unique account numbers which have not initiated a transaction for a predetermined period of time.

11. The filter of claim 1 wherein the credit/debit card network processor comprises a merchant processor linked to a switch processor and wherein the filter processor comprises a banking processor linked to an administrator's processor.

12. The filter of claim 1 wherein the filter processor is maintained by a program administrator having a balance account and wherein, during a force post portion of the transaction, the filter processor debits a transaction amount for each validated transaction to the balance account of the program administrator and credits the transaction amount to an account of the merchant involved in the transaction.

13. The filter of claim 1 wherein the system includes only debit cards.

14. A filtering method for implementing a program having participants, said program permitting the participants to obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants

who are part of the program and who are part of a

5   credit/debit card network, which credit/debit card network

also includes unauthorized merchants who are not part of the

program and who are part of the credit/debit card network,

each merchant having access via an input/output (I/O) port to

a credit/debit card network, said filtering method comprising

10   the steps of:

a.   providing a plurality of cards, each assigned

to one participant and having a unique account

number corresponding to an account of the

participant;

15   b.   accessing the following program data:

(1) data identifying the authorized unique

account numbers of the participants, and

(2) data identifying the authorized merchants;

c.   transmitting the following transaction data in

20   response to an initiating transaction based on an

initiating account number:

(1) the initiating account number of the card

initiating the transaction,

(2) merchant identification data of the

25   merchant involved in the transaction, and

(3) data regarding the amount of the initiated

transaction;

d.   comparing the transmitted transaction data to

the program data;

30   e.   validating the transaction when the comparing

step indicates that the transaction involves an

authorized merchant using the unique account number

of a participant;

f.   invalidating the transaction when the comparing
step indicates that the initiating account number
is not one of the authorized account numbers; and
g.   invalidating the transaction when the comparing
step indicates that the merchant involved in the
transaction is not one of the authorized merchants.

15.   The filtering method of claim 14 wherein the steps
of initiating, evaluating, validating and invalidating are
performed electronically whereby the transaction is
paperless.

16.   The filtering method of claim 14 wherein the cards
are only debit cards.

17.   A system for implementing a program having
participants, said program permitting the participants to
obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants who
are part of the program, said system for use with:
a credit/debit card network which includes the
authorized merchants who are part of the credit/debit card
network and which also includes unauthorized merchants who
are not part of the program and who are part of the
credit/debit card network, each merchant having access via an
input/output (I/O) port to a credit/debit card network; and
a plurality of cards, each assigned to one participant
and having a unique account number corresponding to an
account of the participant;
said system comprising:
a.   a filter accessing the following program data:
(1)data identifying the authorized unique
account numbers of the participants, and

(2) data identifying the authorized merchants;
said filter interfacing with the credit/debit card
network;

b. said filter responsive to an initiating
transaction based on an initiating account number
for transmitting from the credit/debit card network
to the filter the following transaction data:

(1) the initiating account number of the card
initiating the transaction,

(2) merchant identification data of the
merchant involved in the transaction, and

(3) data regarding the amount of the initiated
transaction;

c. said filter evaluating the transaction data
transmitted to the filter by the credit/debit card
network by comparing the transaction data to the
program data;

d. said filter generating validating data for the
transaction when the evaluated transaction data
indicates that the transaction involves an
authorized merchant using the unique account number
of one of the participants;

e. said filter generating invalidating data for
the transaction when the evaluated transaction data
indicates that the initiating account number is not
one of the authorized account numbers;

f. said filter generating invalidating data for
the transaction when the evaluated transaction data
indicates that the merchant involved in the
transaction is not one of the authorized merchants;
and

g.   said filter transmitting the validating or

50   invalidating data to the credit/debit card network

so that the credit/debit card network provides the

validating or invalidating data for the evaluated

transaction to the merchant involved in the

transaction.

18.   The filter of claim 17 wherein the cards are only
debit cards.

19.   A filter for implementing a program having
participants, said program permitting the participants to
obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants who
are part of the program and who are part of a credit/debit

5   card network, which credit/debit card network also includes
unauthorized merchants who are not part of the program and
who are part of the credit/debit card network, each merchant
having access via an input/output (I/O) port to a
credit/debit card network, said filter for use with a

10   plurality of cards, each of the cards having a unique account
number corresponding to an account; said filter comprising:
      a filter accessing the following program data:
            (1)   data identifying the authorized unique
            account number of each card, and

15   (2)   data identifying the authorized
            merchants;
      said filter interfacing with the credit/debit card
network;
      said filter including means, responsive to an

20   initiating transaction based on an initiating account
number, for transmitting from the credit/debit card
network to the filter the following transaction data:

(1)   the initiating account number of the card initiating the transaction,

(2)   merchant identification data of the merchant involved in the transaction, and

(3) data regarding the amount of the initiated transaction;

said filter including means for evaluating the transaction data transmitted to the filter by the credit/debit card network by comparing the transaction data to the program data;

said filter evaluating means including means for generating validating data for the transaction when the evaluated transaction data indicates that the transaction involves an authorized merchant using the unique account number of one of the cards;

said filter evaluating means including means for generating invalidating data for the transaction when the evaluated transaction data indicates that the initiating account number is not one of the authorized account numbers;

said filter evaluating means including means for generating invalidating data for the transaction when the evaluated transaction data indicates that the merchant involved in the transaction is not one of the authorized merchants; and

said filter including means for transmitting the validating or invalidating data to the credit/debit card network so that the credit card network provides the validating or invalidating data for the evaluated transaction to the merchant involved in the transaction.

20. The filter of claim 19 wherein the cards are only debit cards.

21. A filter for implementing a program having participants, said program permitting the participants to obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants who are part of the program and who are part of a credit/debit

5 card network, which credit/debit card network also includes unauthorized merchants who are not part of the program and who are part of the credit/debit card network, each merchant having access via an input/output (I/O) port to a credit/debit card network, said filter for use with a

10 plurality of cards, each of the cards having a unique account number corresponding to an account; said filter comprising:

a. a filter accessing the following program data:

(1) data identifying the authorized unique

15 account number of each card, and

(2) data identifying the authorized merchants;

said filter interfacing with the credit/debit card network;

20 b. said filter responsive to an initiating transaction based on an initiating account number and transmitting from the credit/debit card network to the filter the following transaction data:

(1) the initiating account number of the card

25 initiating the transaction,

(2) merchant identification data of the merchant involved in the transaction, and

(3) data regarding the amount of the initiated transaction;

30   c.   said filter evaluating the transaction data
      transmitted to the filter by the credit/debit card
      network by comparing the transaction data to the
      program data;

      d.   said filter generating validating data for the
35   transaction when the evaluated transaction data
      indicates that the transaction involves an
      authorized merchant using the unique account number
      of one of the cards;

      e.   said filter generating invalidating data for
40   the transaction when the evaluated transaction data
      indicates that the initiating account number is not
      one of the authorized account numbers;

      f.   said filter generating invalidating data for
      the transaction when the evaluated transaction data
45   indicates that the merchant involved in the
      transaction is not one of the authorized merchants;
      and

      g.   said filter transmitting the validating or
      invalidating data to the credit/debit card network
50   so that the credit card network provides the
      validating or invalidating data for the evaluated
      transaction to the merchant involved in the
      transaction.

      22.   A filtering method for implementing a program
having participants, said program permitting the participants
to obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants
who are part of the program and who are part of a
5   credit/debit card network, which credit/debit card network
also includes unauthorized merchants who are not part of the
program and who are part of the credit/debit card network,

each merchant having access via an input/output (I/O) port to
a credit/debit card network, said filtering method comprising

10   the steps of:

   a.   providing a plurality of cards, each assigned
   to one participant and having a unique account
   number corresponding to an account of the
   participant;

15   b.   accessing the following program data:

      (1) data identifying the authorized unique
      account numbers of the participants, and

      (2) data identifying the authorized merchants;

   c.   transmitting the following transaction data in

20   response to a transaction based on an initiating
   account number:

      (1) the initiating account number of the card
      initiating the transaction,

      (2) merchant identification data of the

25   merchant involved in the transaction, and

      (3) data regarding the amount of the initiated
      transaction;

   d.   comparing the transmitted transaction data to
   the program data;

30   e.   validating the transaction when the comparing
   step indicates that the transaction involves an
   authorized merchant using the unique account number
   of a participant;

   f.   invalidating the transaction when the comparing

35   step indicates that the initiating account number
   is not one of the authorized account numbers; and

   g.   invalidating the transaction when the comparing
   step indicates that the merchant involved in the
   transaction is not one of the authorized merchants.

23.   A system for implementing a program for a customer
having participants, said program permitting the participants
to obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants
who are part of the program and who are part of a

5   credit/debit card network, which credit/debit card network
also includes unauthorized merchants who are not part of the
program and who are part of the credit/debit card network,
each merchant having access via an input/output (I/O) port to
a credit/debit card network, said system comprising:

10   a.   a plurality of cards, each assigned to one
participant and having a unique account number
corresponding to an account of the participant;
b.   a filter accessing the following program data:
(1) data identifying the authorized unique

15   account numbers of the participants, and
(2) data identifying the authorized merchants;
said filter interfacing with the credit/debit card
network;
c.   means, responsive to an initiating transaction

20   based on an initiating account number, for
transmitting from the credit/debit card network to
the filter the following transaction data:
(1) the initiating account number of the card
initiating the transaction,

25   (2) merchant identification data of the
merchant involved in the transaction, and
(3) data regarding the amount of the initiated
transaction;
d.   said filter including means for evaluating the

30   transaction data transmitted to the filter by the
credit/debit card network by comparing the
transaction data to the program data;

e. said filter evaluating means including means
for generating validating data for the transaction
when the evaluated transaction data indicates that
the transaction involves an authorized merchant
using the unique account number of one of the
participants;

f. said filter evaluating means including means
for generating invalidating data for the
transaction when the evaluated transaction data
indicates that the initiating account number is not
one of the authorized account numbers;

g. said filter evaluating means including means
for generating invalidating data for the
transaction when the evaluated transaction data
indicates that the merchant involved in the
transaction is not one of the authorized merchants;
and

h. said filter including means for transmitting
the validating or invalidating data to the
credit/debit card network so that the credit/debit
card network provides the validating or
invalidating data for the evaluated transaction to
the merchant involved in the transaction.

24. The system of claim 23 wherein the cards consist of
debit cards only.

25. The system of claim 23 wherein the program
comprises an incentive award program.

26. A method for implementing a program for a customer
having participants, said program permitting the participants

to obtain products and/or services from authorized merchants
who are part of the program and who are part of a

5   credit/debit card network, which credit/debit card network
also includes unauthorized merchants who are not part of the
program and who are part of the credit/debit card network,
each merchant having access via an input/output (I/O) port to
a credit/debit card network, said method comprising the steps

10   of:

      a.   providing a plurality of cards, each assigned
to one participant and having a unique account
number corresponding to an account of the
participant;

15   b.   accessing the following program data:

        (1) data identifying the authorized unique
account numbers of the participants, and

        (2) data identifying the authorized merchants;

      c.   transmitting the following transaction data in

20   response to an initiating transaction based on an
initiating account number:

        (1) the initiating account number of the card
initiating the transaction,

        (2) merchant identification data of the

25   merchant involved in the transaction, and

        (3) data regarding the amount of the initiated
transaction;

      d.   comparing the transmitted transaction data to
the program data;

30   e.   validating the transaction when the comparing
step indicates that the transaction involves an
authorized merchant using the unique account number
of a participant;

f.   invalidating the transaction when the comparing
step indicates that the initiating account number
is not one of the authorized account numbers; and

g.   invalidating the transaction when the comparing
step indicates that the merchant involved in the
transaction is not one of the authorized merchants.

27.   The method of claim 26 wherein the cards consist of
debit cards only.

28.   The method of claim 26 wherein the program
comprises an incentive award program.